



5th ANNUAL STATE OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS ADDRESS

Mayor Ronald O. Loveridge
Saturday, June 3, 2006

Good morning, welcome, and thank you for coming to the 5th Annual Mayor's State of the Neighborhoods Address and Neighborhoods Awards Ceremony.

It is a good time for Riverside's 26 community neighborhoods.

Your homes have the highest value ever. The median new home price in Riverside is \$565,000. And the median existing home price for resale is \$394,000.

A good city is made up of good neighborhoods. We live in neighborhoods. They are the litmus test of our services, our quality of life. As realtors remind us, the name of the residential game is location, location, location. And as a City, Riverside competes for good residents as well as good businesses.

KUDOS

To begin, kudos are in order.

Kudos to Bernie Waltzer, 2006 recipient of the Jack Clarke Good Award. Kudos to all those receiving 2006 Neighborhood Pride Awards. And kudos to the Neighborhoods that Work.

I offer special thanks to the Northside improvement Association. It is the oldest of the City's neighborhood groups. Meeting the second Monday of every month, Northside residents gather to discuss and to share their views of how to make their neighborhood a better place. During my fourteen years as the Ward One Council member, they taught me that neighborhood associations make a real difference in enhancing and/or sustaining the quality of life.

Kudos to the City's national best practices for neighborhoods: Crime free Multi Housing. Keep Riverside Clean & Beautiful, CURE (Clean-Up Riverside's Environment), and Neighborhood Livability Task Force. Their work is simply extraordinary!

Kudos for the improvements in 311 (One call does it all), Code Enforcement, graffiti removal, tree trimming, and street sweeping.

Kudos for the community policing strategies, represented best by the proactive work of POP Officers (Problem Oriented Policing). And kudos to the good work of Cops and Clergy.

Kudos for the investment of millions of dollars in improving the neighborhood parks of Riverside. Go see, for examples, the La Sierra Community Park at Gramercy and La Sierra or the award winning Sycamore Highlands Park.

Kudos for the increasing attention and funding to traffic improvements. As Mayor, I strongly support traffic calming in the neighborhoods of Riverside. For an overview of traffic improvements, note carefully what is identified in the most recent Riverside Report.

Kudos to the academies hosted by the City, specifically for neighborhood Leadership and Neighborhood Watch.

Kudos to the well organized annual neighborhood conferences. This year the Neighborhood Conference will be held on July 8th at California Baptist University. Its theme is "Building Community One Neighborhood at a Time."

Kudos to the ongoing good work of the Riverside Neighborhood Partnership. This is an important gathering of neighborhood leaders from across the City.

Kudos to the city's General Plan's Attention to and emphasis on our 26 neighborhoods communities.

Kudos to the Riverside Housing Development Corporation for its success in providing affordable and work force housing.

Kudos to the Development Department for its leadership in transforming Topaz and Turquoise from the worst to one of the City's best multi family housing complexes.

Kudos even to City Hall. Residents in the City's annual survey of residents are giving increasingly high marks to neighborhood services, with fire and trash collection heading the list.

Finally, I take pride in the ongoing Mayor's Night Out, now totaling 118. Each month, we visit one of Riverside's 26 neighborhoods. The community is a better place because of Mayor's Night Out.

WHERE DO WE GO? WHAT DO WE DO?

While many good things are happening, there is much work to do. Where to go? What should we do to make Riverside neighborhoods the best possible places to live?

Several directions....

First, we must continually commit ourselves to the Council established goal of 60% homeownership.

I presented and the Council recently approved a revisit to the 2002 Homeownership Task Force Report. In September, a review and recommendations to enhance homeownership will be presented to the Council.

There is a need for many different kinds of housing—only about one in five American households are comprised of husband and wife and children at home.

In addition to single family homes, we need to support downtown housing...transit oriented development...condos, especially as the access point for first time home buyers...major senior projects...infill housing...mixed use projects...and smart growth.

Second, beyond the overall citywide goal of 60% homeownership, we must be attentive to particular neighborhoods. There are six of the 26 community neighborhoods which have less than 50% homeownership. In June, I will present a Council Report asking that the Development Department put together a game plan to increase the percentages in at least two of the six community neighborhoods to 60% or higher.

Third, the General Plan calls for two Community neighborhood plans a year. We just completed the University Community Plan—it is excellent! Now it must be implemented. I call upon City Manager Brad Hudson to take this plan seriously and make its policy calls happen. The University Community Plan should set the procedure and priority for keeping the neighborhood plans off the shelf and on the street.

I would strongly recommend the next community plan in 2006 be completed for the Eastside.

The two neighborhoods surrounding the UCR campus, University and Eastside, must become success stories of community involvement, best practices, investment, and respect. The City must devote continuing attention and major resources to both neighborhoods. And UCR should embrace its nearby neighbors and commit its resources and expertise to making significant changes.

Perhaps in the future years, the Riverside Neighborhood Partnership can recommend choices for the two annual community neighborhood plans.

Fourth, last week I attended the annual NUSA Conference, Neighborhoods USA, in Kansas City. We heard about many best neighborhood practices in other cities. As I listened and talked with neighborhood leaders across the country, the most important approach not yet in Riverside was from the City of Little Rock. They have what they call Alert Centers. It is a nation best practice.

Strongly supported by their Mayor and Council, the Alert Center Mission Statement is as follows”

“The Mission of the Alert Center is to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Little Rock. The alert center provides a location where any citizen can go to receive information, assistance, and services. The alert center is supported by Facilitators, Code Enforcement Officers, and COPP Officers. Their goal is to promote and assist with the revitalization of neighborhoods by empowering citizens to take action, get involved, and address neighborhood issues. By providing a strong support base, the alert center will help improve living conditions and produce safe, healthy, and vibrant neighborhoods.”

In my review, our eight community centers could provide comparable information, assistance, and services. I will be talking with the City Manager and members of the Council as to ways this could work in Riverside. I expect to present an “alert center” report and recommendations to the Council in September or October.

Fifth, cities compete. We compete for good residents as well as good businesses. However, while we spend big bucks marketing economic development, we do not market the City as a good place to live. We need to highlight the exciting and varied neighborhoods across this City. This means resources...materials...web sites...partnerships with realtors and school districts. I challenge the Development Department to commit their excellent staff to presenting Riverside as a good place to live—we need to tell our neighborhood story.

Sixth, now the question—how are our neighborhoods doing? We primarily offer anecdotal comments and impressions. We have few specific performance indicators. Are all neighborhoods improving or are some declining? I expect to present to the Council later this year an approach to a systematic neighborhood report card.

Noteworthy however, there are computerized ways to do an inventory and track what is happening in a neighborhood. As explained in a recent Governing magazine article, “Using hand-held mini-computers about the size of a Blackberry, along with digital cameras, citizens survey the conditions in their neighborhood, from run-down houses to busted street lamps. Armed with that inventory, neighborhoods not only have a punch list of problems but also a baseline for gauging whether their fortunes are rising or declining.”

DANA (Downtown AREA Neighborhood Alliance) currently conducts such a survey, without, however, the more advanced technology and software.

We need a ComNET (“computerized neighborhood environment tracking”) option for interested Riverside neighborhoods.

I will present a request to the Riverside Neighborhood Partnership to review different choices and costs and make a report with recommendations to the Council.

Seventh, the future of our neighborhoods is closely related to what happens in our K-12 schools. I have been disappointed at our inability to work more closely or innovatively with Alvord and RUSD. In the Fall, I will call together again the Joint Facilities Committee to look for always to make Riverside a better community, for the City, the School Districts, and especially for our neighborhoods.

Eighth and last, as in the State of the City, I call Riverside to become a Clean and Green City. A Task Force has completed a far reaching draft report which will be presented to the Council in November or December. A Clean and Green City is also a good city for neighborhoods.

One marker is trees. I will present in June a report to Council asking the City commit itself to planting 100, 000 trees in the first decade of the 21st Century. To preview, we are well underway.

CONCLUSION

To close, the neighborhood agenda is both exciting and extensive. Perhaps the best policy academic I have ever met, John Kirlin, said that in the 21st Century, there should be three central ways of thinking about governance, namely neighborhoods, regions, and global market. It is essential that we recognize that neighborhoods offer the keys to a good city. A good neighborhood is more a responsibility than a right. Livability comes from involvement. We all need to step up and take charge. **We must keep our eyes on the prize.**

Thank you very much.